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Grow a

INTRODUCTION

WEEK 1



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Big Idea: The first fruits grow when we stop making life about us and start living connected to Jesus for the sake of others.

Main Scriptures:

Mark 11:12-21
Galatians 5:22-23
1 John 4:7-12
John 15:1-11

Key Point: Spiritual fruit isn't produced by looking Christian on the outside but by remaining connected to Jesus and allowing His character to grow within us.

Bottom Line: Jesus isn't looking for people who simply look fruitful—He is looking for people whose fruit feeds somebody else.

Jesus is not looking for people who look fruitful – He is looking for people whose fruit feeds somebody **else**.

We all know the disappointment of something that advertises one thing but delivers another – the on-line order that looks nothing like the picture, the used car that looked great in photos but was a rust bucket in person. That same disappointment, it turns out, is exactly what Jesus encountered with a fig tree outside Jerusalem, and the lesson He preached through it is uncomfortably personal.

1. Lots of Leaves, No **Fruit**

In Mark 11:12-14, Jesus approaches a fig tree covered in leaves, expecting to find the early fruit that leafed trees could produce – and finds nothing. He curses the tree, and Mark immediately sandwiches the Temple scene between the two tree encounters. The Temple, like the tree, was full of religious activity and appearance, but when the King walked through the door, He found no fruit – and overturned the tables.

2. The Problem Is the **Claim**, Not the Calendar

The tree was advertising readiness it did not actually have. The issue was not the season; the issue was that the leaves made a promise the branches could not keep. Christians are skilled at leaves – the T-shirt, the Bible app, the worship playlist, the fish on the bumper – and none of those things are bad in themselves. The danger is when our leaves advertise something our lives do not deliver. As Jesus says in Matthew 7, “You can identify them by their fruit.”

3. Fruit Always Has a **Recipient**

A fruit tree does not grow fruit for itself. An apple tree does not produce apples because it was hungry. Fruit grows on the tree, but it grows for somebody else.

We often treat the fruit of the Spirit as personal comfort – “God, give me peace because I am stressed” – but what if God grows love in you because somebody else needs love, and patience in you because somebody needs someone who will not give up on them? Fruit grows in you so it can be given through you.

4. Fruit Problems Are **Root** Problems

In John 15, Jesus does not say “try harder” – He says “remain in me,” because no branch can bear fruit by itself. Root yourself in approval and you will produce insecurity. Root yourself in comparison and you will produce envy. Root yourself in achievement and you will produce anxiety. But rooted in Jesus, what grows is His fruit. We do not become fruitful by decorating our branches; we become fruitful by deepening our roots.

5. Love and Joy – The First Pair

From 1 John 4, love originates in God – “God is love” – so staying connected to Him is what produces love in us. Biblical love is not mere niceness; it says, “I want God's best for you even when it costs me.” Received love becomes released love. Joy, as Jesus describes it in John 15, is not happiness dependent on circumstances; it is an anchor that holds steady when everything above the surface is moving. Love gets us outside ourselves; joy frees us from needing everything to go our way. Together they make us bend – and a branch bending low with fruit is a branch that makes the fruit reachable for someone else.

6. Look at **Jesus** First

The King washed feet, touched lepers, welcomed children, and gave Himself fully. Then He bent lower still and carried a cross. Hebrews says it was for the joy set before Him that Jesus endured the cross – so Jesus embodied both love and joy before asking us to produce either. We do not bear fruit to make Jesus love us. We bear fruit because He already does.

Before Jesus asks us to bend low, He bent low for us. The cross is the supreme act of love, and the resurrection is the anchor of joy. When we fix our eyes on that, fruit is not another item on a failing checklist – it is the natural overflow of a life staying close to Jesus.

Next Steps

Apply the message: This week, ask yourself one question: Who can I love and serve this week who cannot love me back? Identify one person – someone who cannot advance you, repay you, or even thank you – and offer one concrete act of love. Before you act, spend time remaining in Jesus rather than straining to produce. Do it not to earn God's love, but in response to a love already freely given.

If you prayed to put your trust in Jesus for the first time today, pick up the free Following Jesus book and tell someone before you leave so the church can celebrate with you and help you take your next step.